

Access eased for potential radio buffs

Morse code not needed

By Kathy Walsh Nufer
Post-Crescent staff writer

As of Feb. 14, Americans with a penchant for ham radio communications can get their amateur radio license without having to learn that combination of dits and dahs that make up the Morse code.

That's great news for the thousands of people who have shied away from ham radio because of the code requirement.

Now those who wish to obtain the new code-free technical class license must pass a 55-question written exam that covers ham radio operating rules and privileges, international regulations, safety procedures and technical information about radio communications. There will be no questions, however, on the history or usage of the Morse code.

The Federal Communications Commission approved the no-code amateur radio license on Dec. 13 of last year, following a long debate.

Essentially, what the FCC did was modify the existing technical class license to drop the Morse code requirement for all amateur operating privileges on frequencies above 30 MHz.

The intent was to eliminate a barrier which has intimidated access to amateur radio and encourage more potential amateurs to give it a try.

The change does not affect the novice class license which is now considered an "alternate entry point" for prospective amateurs who are willing to take a Morse test without taking the more difficult technician theory exam.

If the holder of this new license wants to upgrade to attain privileges on the HF bands, a code test will be required.

"It certainly opens up amateur radio to a lot of people who think they couldn't learn the code," Myron Jackson, Fox Cities Amateur Ra-

dio Club president, said of the new codeless license.

Jackson, who teaches classes to prospective licensees, said the code is a major obstacle for many. "It's another language and it takes considerable work and effort to become proficient."

Ham operator Pete Clausen sees the codeless license as a new opportunity to increase the amateur radio ranks. "It allows for more people to enjoy our hobby," he stated.

Both he and Jackson noted that ham operators have mixed views about the no-code license. "Some defend the code requirement," Jackson said, "because it still is used today to quite some extent by amateurs and the military."

But, he added, advances in digital electronics have led others to question the need for the code which is becoming a somewhat archaic type of communication.

Archaic or not, he said, there are many who want to preserve "antiques" like the code.

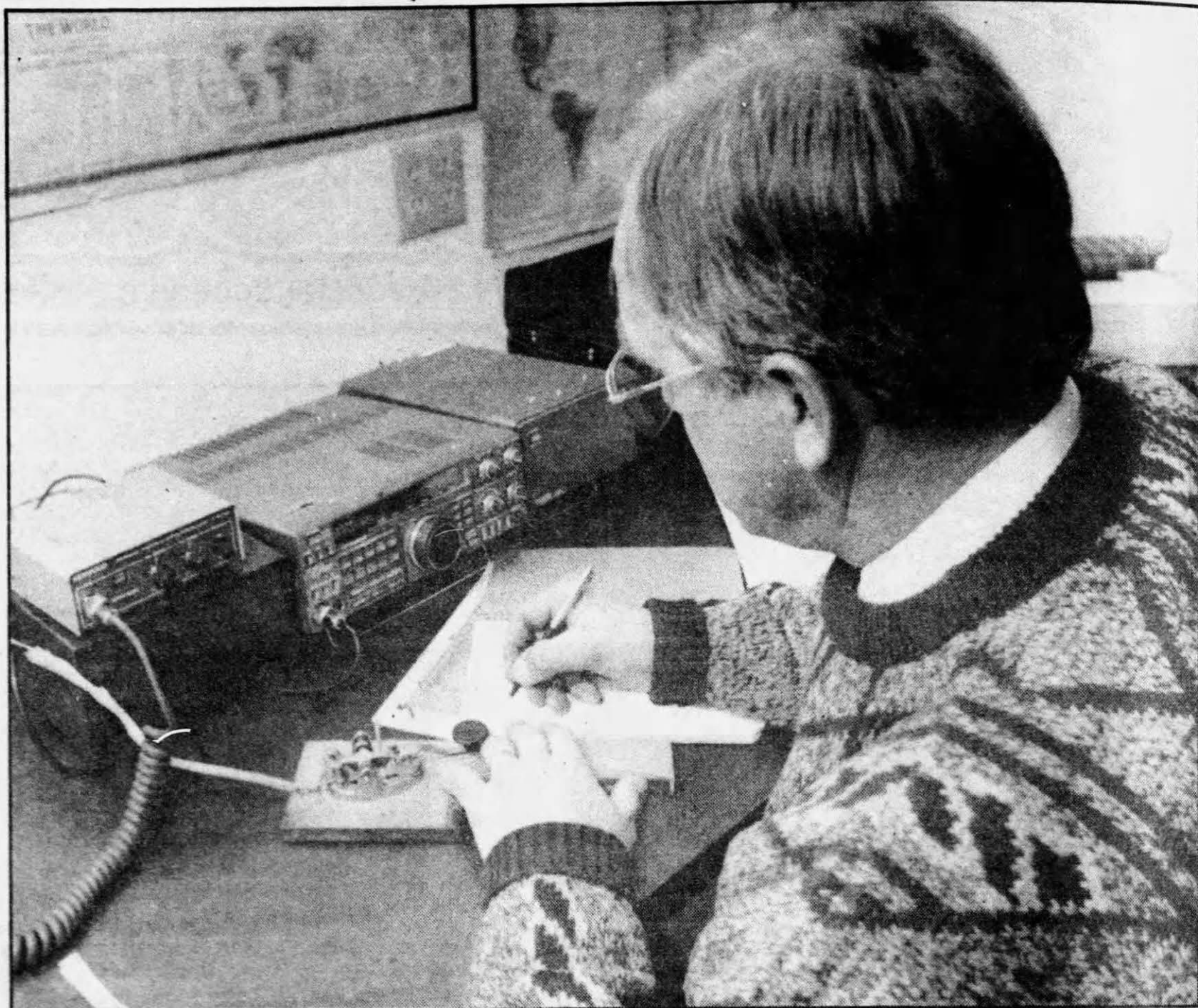
Jackson said the new license should attract more people with an interest in electronics and technology who have avoided amateur radio as a hobby because of the code.

Both he and Clausen cited the large number of computer enthusiasts who can now get into amateur radio. Getting these people involved could be a big plus for the development of communications technology, they said. Amateurs have been responsible for developing everything from mobile use of radio communications to low earth orbital communications.

Officials of the American Radio Relay League, Inc., based in Newington, Conn., which pushed for the code-free license, look upon it as a major breakthrough in opening the world of amateur radio to many more Americans.

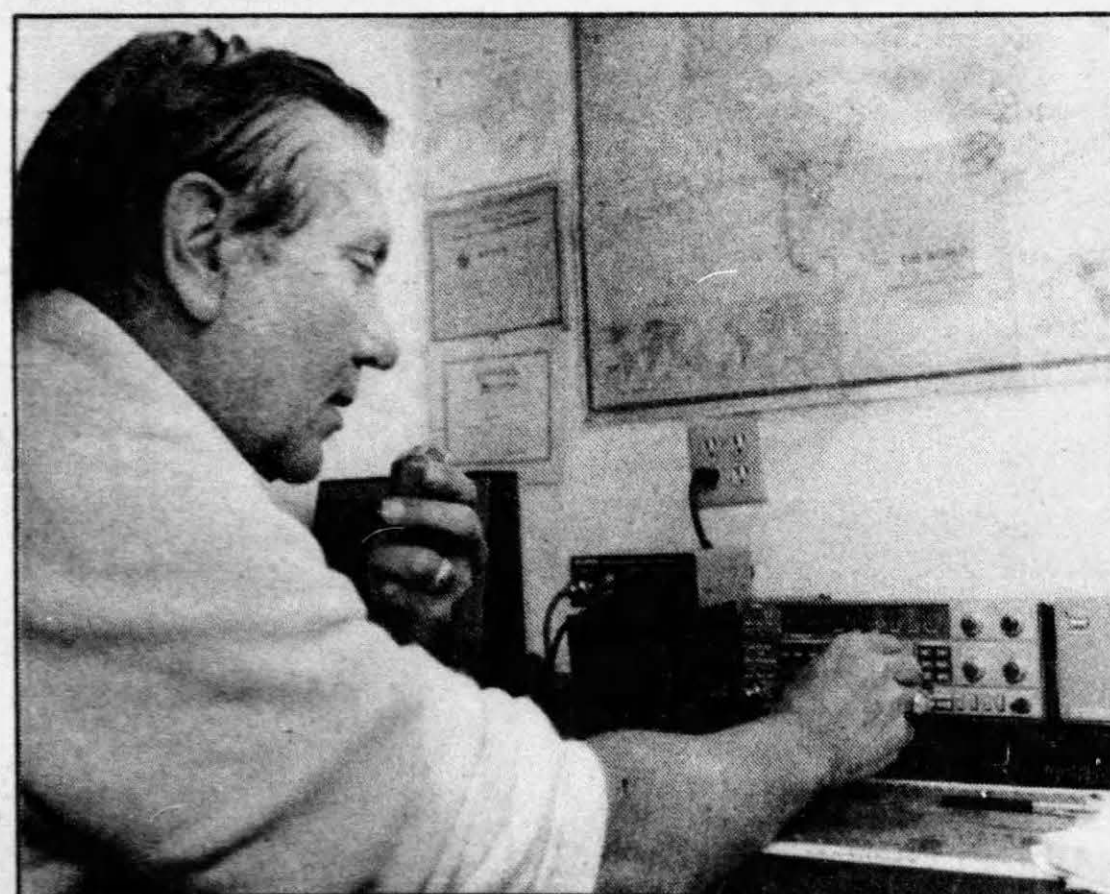
With more than 160,000 members, ARRL is the largest organization of radio amateurs in the United States.

New code-free licensees will be able to use pocket-sized handheld radios, mobile transceivers and base stations for short-range voice communications.



Post-Crescent photos by Ed Deschler

MYRON JACKSON, above, president of the Fox Cities Amateur Radio Club, takes down a message coming in in Morse code and works the radiotelegraphy key. At left, Pete Clausen talks on the ham radio.



These communications, say the ARRL, will be nearly free of interference and long-range skip that mar citizens' band communications.

Also, because of the installation nationwide of more than 10,000 repeater stations to increase the range of the communications, amateur radio operators will be able to hook up with phone circuits to make local telephone calls from their mobile or handheld radios.

ARRL anticipates the rush of new

code-free licensees will come from several groups, including:

- Senior citizens who like the security afforded from keeping in touch via pocket-size two-way radios.
- Family members who want to use a mobile radio to call home.
- Teens on the go who want to keep their parents apprised of their movements.
- Computer buffs looking for an over-the-air link between PCs.

► Code-free licensees may also take part in packet communications, which allows direct computer-to-computer communications and is expected to be one of the fastest-growing uses of amateur radio this decade.

The new change in the licensing structure puts the United States in league with other countries such as Great Britain, Germany, Australia, Japan and New Zealand which also offer code-free privileges.

Amateur radio doesn't require a large investment

By Kathy Walsh Nufer
Post-Crescent staff writer

Starting out in amateur radio need not be a big investment. But, as with most hobbies, the sky is the limit on what you can spend on equipment as your interest, your license classification and your sophistication grow.

When local ham operator Pete Clausen started, for example, he invested \$25 to \$50 in his station. Today that investment has grown to close to \$8,000 and his station now includes a radio, antennae, computer, a packet for computer-

to-computer communications, tuner and other controls.

Myron Jackson, president of the Fox Cities Amateur Radio Club which numbers approximately 100 members, outlined what the beginner can expect to spend on equipment.

Typically, what is needed to outfit a new licensee is:

- A transceiver, a combination transmitter and receiver priced between \$150 and \$200.
- A Morse Code telegraphic key (not required if you are getting the new codeless technician license) for under \$5.
- A microphone, under \$5

- Wire antenna, under \$5.

From there ham operators can expand in many directions, adding everything from a computer to a tuner, to amplifiers, amateur television and a moon bounce.

Anyone with an interest in getting into amateur radio should contact the American Amateur Radio League (AARL) at 203-666-1541 for more information, or a member of the Fox Cities Amateur Radio Club.

Jackson, who plans to teach a class for beginners next fall, noted that the club meets at 7 p.m. the third Monday of every month at Roosevelt Junior High School, Appleton.